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THE DANGER OF NATIONAL ISOLATION.

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STATES TO THE PAN-AMERICAN CONFERENCE.

THE rise of the United States to the position of a great World Power has destroyed the traditional principles of political equilibrium. There is a growing belief, particularly amongst the Governments of Europe, that this change involves serious problems which, sooner or later, they will be compelled to face.

The people of Latin America have watched the new grouping of international relations with vague apprehension. The European press has lost no opportunity to encourage this attitude by constantly emphasizing the dangers involved in the dominant position of the United States on the American continent. There is abundant evidence that the ultimate purpose in view has been to foster in South America a feeling of distrust toward the United States, which would forever prevent a close understanding between the republics of the American continent. The determined stand taken by the United States in the Anglo-Venezuelan controversy of 1895 was interpreted in certain sections of South America as a step toward the formal declaration of the hegemony of the United States.

The Spanish-American war, the acquisition of Porto Rico, the establishment of a quasi-protectorate over Cuba, and the assumption of responsibility for the administration of the finances of Santo Domingo were interpreted as expressions of a definite and fixed purpose to assert a right of final revision over the international relations of the American republics.

The domestic situation is in many respects extraordinary. Our entry into international politics has been a greater surprise to the people of the United States than to the Governments of

Europe. During the lifetime of the present generation, foreign affairs have occupied so insignificant a place in the affairs of the nation that the situation confronting the Government at the close of the Spanish-American war seemed strange and almost inexplicable. It was difficult for the people to realize that the position which the Government was called upon to occupy was the logical outcome of the extraordinary industrial and social development of the nineteenth century. The country had become mighty, not because of any ambition to play a part in the world's affairs, but by reason of its great economic power and its strategic political position with respect to Europe and the countries of the American continent.

To those who have watched the progress of American affairs since 1898, this gradual awakening to the consciousness of national power and influence has been one of the most inspiring spectacles in the history of the United States. Hand in hand with this consciousness of power, there is slowly developing a sense of national responsibility, which is reacting throughout the public life of the country, raising the standard of civic effort and emphasizing our obligations toward the nations of the earth, especially toward the republics of the American continent.

The fact that the new position assumed by the United States is regarded as a disturbing factor in European politics has created a situation which we can no longer afford to ignore. The old equilibrium has been destroyed, and it will require many years to bring about adjustment to the new relations. The European Governments, therefore, regard the extension of the influence of the United States with ill-concealed concern.

Of far deeper significance, however, is the change of attitude of the people of Europe. While official and diplomatic relations have been of the most cordial character, there is noticeable a growing feeling of popular antagonism toward the United States which the most lavish display of official courtesy has been unable to disguise. Much of this has been due to commercial rivalries and to the fear of the commercial supremacy of the United States. To summarize the situation in a few words, it is evident that we are gradually drifting toward a position of national isolation. Every consideration of national policy dictates that no effort should be spared to avoid a situation which must ultimately become a source of national weakness.

Our relations with the countries of Latin America thus acquire a new significance. Heretofore, the mass of our people have interpreted this relation as purely one-sided. We have been ready, and even anxious, to be of service to our sister republics, but we have taken it for granted that no counter-service could be expected in return. The new grouping of international relations, which the results of the Spanish-American and Russo-Japanese wars have made evident, demands that in the future our international policy should meet, not only with the approval, but with the active support, of our sister republics.

In our ignorance of South-American conditions we have failed to appreciate that, within a comparatively few years, we shall have to deal with Powers of real magnitude in this southern section of the continent. If they distrust us, we shall find our hands tied in the councils of the nations. With their support, a new equilibrium of power—the best guarantee of the world's peace—will be established.

The greatest difficulty which the Government of the United States has had to face in dealing with the new situation has been the unpreparedness of the public mind for the great problems suddenly thrust upon us. In our common schools and universities, little attention had been given to foreign languages and still less to foreign institutions. The fact that the thought of the people was rarely directed to foreign affairs was clearly reflected in the public press, which gave but little attention to these matters. Time and again, it has been pointed out to us that their ignorance of foreign affairs would lead the people of the United States into giving frequent though unwitting offence, particularly in their relations with the Latin-American republics, and would thus tend to make more pronounced the misunderstanding of their motives and purposes.

Immediately prior to the South-American tour of Secretary Root, the distrust of the United States reached its height. There was a well-defined feeling that the Monroe Doctrine was not intended as a safeguard to the American republics, but rather a first step toward the preemption of Latin America as the field for the exclusive influence of the United States. Mr. Root's visit has demonstrated not only that this feeling of distrust can be eradicated, but that it can be made to give way to one of sincere friendship. His remarkable address to the Pan-American Con-

ference and his subsequent speeches in Montevideo, Buenos Ayres, Santiago and Lima are being read and reread by the leaders of thought and action in these countries, and have largely destroyed the feeling of antagonism which has so long existed.

It must not be supposed, however, that the effect of this visit will be permanent if not supported by a sincere effort on the part of the American people to cultivate closer relations with the people of South America. We must overcome certain fundamental weaknesses, which constitute a menace to the development of a better understanding between the northern and southern sections of this hemisphere. The first of these defects is the tendency to interpret South-American institutions in terms of the least advanced of those countries. In our ignorance, we have taken it for granted that the turbulent conditions which prevail in a few of the republics are characteristic of all. We have failed to appreciate the fact that South America offers as many gradations of institutional development as Europe, and that the usual slurring judgment is deeply resented by the more advanced countries.

The second defect is of a far more serious nature, as it involves one of the fundamental traits of our national character. Foreign critics of the American people have often pointed out the spirit of condescension, bordering on contempt, which marks the attitude of the average American toward foreign institutions. The slightest divergence from our form of government is regarded as a stamp of inferiority. American publications constantly dwell on the supposed inability of the people of South America to develop free institutions—a purely gratuitous assumption, which has never been supported by serious scientific investigation. Even in our university instruction, there is a tendency to use the terms “Anglo-Saxon” and “Latin” as expressing the contrast between the ability to establish and develop free institutions and the absence of this capacity.

This loose reasoning is at the bottom of the popular belief that, while the South-American countries may adopt republican forms of government, the actual operation of their institutions will inevitably lead to more or less disguised forms of despotism. The trend of public opinion in the United States, as reflected in the daily press, is followed with the keenest interest throughout South America. No attempt is made to distinguish between the authority of different writers; they are all regarded as ex-

pressing the views of the American people. This unfortunate situation is further complicated by the "missionary spirit" of the American people. In our relations with foreign peoples, we are apt to assume, not only that our political, social and educational institutions are incomparably superior to those of other countries, but that their only hope of salvation is to use our system as a model. We patronizingly point out that they are probably not prepared to assimilate more than the simpler forms of American institutional growth, but that with patience and conscientious effort they will ultimately be able to reach the more complex.

As a rule, we are utterly unconscious of the fact that we are giving serious offence by this "come-and-be-saved" attitude. Our intentions are excellent; but this fact makes it all the more difficult to convince the American people that a number of the South-American countries are developing political and social institutions in no sense inferior to those of the United States, and in every case in closer harmony with their own special needs than any system of transplanting could hope to accomplish. It is evident that, in our relations with the republics of Latin America, we must develop a greater breadth of view, and a capacity to appreciate the value of institutions different from our own. The above-mentioned obstacles to the development of closer relations with Central and South America, while serious, are in no sense insurmountable; and, in fact, the last few years have witnessed the beginnings of a conscious effort to overcome these shortcomings. There still remains, however, a third difficulty, which, if not overcome, will rekindle the feeling of distrust toward the United States and make its eradication extremely difficult, if not impossible. Throughout South America, one hears constant complaint of the business methods of the merchants and manufacturers of the United States. If these complaints related only to the refusal of our manufacturers to give long-term credits and to the general spirit of suspicion and distrust which characterizes their attitude toward South-American merchants, the most obvious explanation would be that these are difficulties incident to the early stages of commercial intercourse. Unfortunately, the complaints are of a far more serious character, involving the good faith and honesty of our merchants and manufacturers. One approaches the subject with some diffidence, not only owing to the delicate questions which it presents, but also

to the fact that there are a number of notable exceptions to the general rule. These exceptions, however, are buried beneath the mass of real grievances of the Spanish-American merchant.

The dishonesty of catalogue descriptions, the wanton disregard of the contract conditions, especially as regards the date of delivery, the insolent indifference to justifiable complaints, are but a few of the counts in the indictment. Considering the treatment which the South-American merchant has received, it is surprising that our commerce with these countries is growing so rapidly. No greater tribute could be paid to the excellence of American as compared with European manufactures. South-American merchants are often anxious to have American goods, but they are conscious of the fact that commercial relations with our manufacturers involve more annoyance and, in certain respects, greater risks than with English, French or German producers. American manufacturers are usually characterized as "*muy vivo*," which is a polite way of saying that the foreigner must be on his guard in dealing with them.

The contrast between what may be called our "domestic" and our "foreign" or "export" commercial morality is so great that it is difficult to make the people of these countries understand that, in the United States, good faith and fair dealing constitute the basis of commercial relations to quite the same, if not to a greater, extent than in Continental Europe. No doubt, the explanation of our treatment of foreign merchants is to be found in the fact that American manufacturers have taken little interest in foreign markets. In periods of industrial depression, spasmodic efforts to capture the South-American market have been made; but, with the revival of domestic trade, the American manufacturer loses all sense of responsibility toward his foreign customers, and his attitude seems to be dictated by the rule, "Let them take what they can get." Whatever the effects of this policy on our foreign trade—and it is certain to be fatal, if not remedied—the most serious aspect of the situation is that it creates a general belief that we are not a people to be trusted. We do not realize to what an extent commercial grievances have intensified the feeling of distrust toward the United States. That there is a great national interest involved in the disappearance of this feeling no one will deny.

L. S. ROWE.